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DISCUSSIONS.

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF ETHICS.

IN a former number of this JOURNAL (July, 1893, p. 507), I offered a defence of my view of Ethics as essentially a practical * science, with special reference to the opposing doctrine set forth in Mr. Bradley's "Ethical Studies," which I had just discovered to have a wider prevalence than I was previously aware of.† I afterwards expanded this defence in an article on "Moral Science and the Moral Life," (January, 1894, p. 160), and I added some

* It ought to be noted, however, that the term "normative" is preferable to the term "practical." Ethics is concerned primarily with the discussion of the moral judgment, *i.e.*, with the consideration of the standard of rightness and wrongness. Now, it is conceivable in the abstract that this study might be pursued by a race of non-practical beings, for whom it would have a purely theoretical interest. For such beings the science would still be normative, being concerned with a standard of judgment; but it would not be practical. This is a point to which I have not given sufficient attention in previous explanations. Still it is a somewhat formal point. For a practical being like man, the study of the moral standard becomes at once a source of moral principles. It is well to remember, however, that a normative science need not be practical. Aesthetics may, perhaps, be taken as an instance.

† Wundt is one of the most notable upholders of this doctrine. Both in his "Ethik" and, more explicitly, in his "System der Philosophie," he insists that philosophic study is purely theoretical. In the latter work, however, he admits that, in an indirect way, philosophy becomes practical through its criticism of the particular practical science. The science of law, for instance, or the science of the theology, may have a practical bearing; and the philosophy of law and the philosophy of religion are indirectly practical, in so far as they criticise the principles upon which those particular sciences rest (see *Einleitung*). But this is really all that I contend for. I do not conceive that it is the business of ethical philosophy to tell us what in particular we are to do. It does not, for instance, instruct us with reference to the pursuit of health or wealth. It leaves this to Hygienics and Economics, and even these particular sciences leave a final appeal to common sense. But Ethics may be expected to throw some light on the place occupied by the subordinate ends with which these particular sciences deal in relation to the supreme end of life. For some instructive criticisms of Wundt's views on this point, I may refer to *Mind* (Old Series), vol. xv., pp. 103-120. I believe that the doctrine of Wundt, as well as that of several other writers, results from a one-sided interpretation of the famous Hegelian dictum that "The Actual is Rational." This excellent saying ought not to be understood as meaning that everything that we happen to find existing at a particular stage in human development is a perfect embodiment of the principle of reason. Such an interpretation is little better than fatalism. If God is to "mend all," we must at least "help him to mend it."

further remarks in a note to the second edition of my "Manual of Ethics." Since the publication of these various statements, I have been waiting with some interest to see whether any of those (apparently a somewhat numerous body) who hold different views would think it worth while to present some counter-statement. Up to the present time, however, my hopes have been disappointed. Views similar to my own have recently been propounded by Mr. Hastings Rashdall in an article on "The Limits of Casuistry"* (July, 1894, p. 459), but I have seen no statement of any other views. With regard to Mr. Bradley himself, I gather that he no longer adheres to the doctrine set forth in his "Ethical Studies," and apparently repeated in his "Principles of Logic;" or at least that he would no longer be prepared to uphold it in the same emphatic form.† Indeed, some of his recent writings in this JOURNAL would lead one to suppose that, so far from being a heretic in this matter, he now bids fair to take his place as "the first by the throne." There is no one, I think, who has more boldly applied ethical principles to the treatment of practical problems than Mr. Bradley has done in his recent article entitled "Some Remarks on Punishment" (April, 1894, p. 269). It is true that, even there, he guards himself at the end from being supposed to lay down any explicit statement as to what ought actually to be done in any particular circumstances; but with this reservation I should entirely concur, and so, if I understand him rightly, would Mr. Rashdall. I am inclined to think, therefore, that on this matter there is now no substantial difference of opinion between Mr. Bradley, Mr. Rashdall, and myself; and I am not aware of any one else who has recently attempted to give a reasoned statement of opinion on the subject, except Dr. Simmel, whose views I have already criticised.

Though, however, there has been no definite exposition of any counter opinions on this matter, my attention has been directed

* Cf. also Mr. Hodder's article on "The Morality that Ought to Be," in *The Philosophical Review* for July, 1894.

† In his "Appearance and Reality" (p. 4), Mr. Bradley has justly ridiculed the idea that reflective thought is not to be pushed to its ultimate metaphysical issues. This, as he says, "appears to be a paradox, since it seems equivalent to saying, You may satisfy your instinctive longing to reflect, as long as you do it in a way which is unsatisfactory." But is there not a similar paradox in the view that reflective thought has a practical value so long as it does not rise above the level of common sense, but ceases to be practical as soon as it becomes systematic?

to two brief criticisms of my views, which it may perhaps be worth while to notice. The first of them is one that appeared in *The Indian Messenger* for Sunday, May 13, 1894. The writer, who signs himself "H. H.," after giving several extracts from my article on "Moral Science and the Moral Life," and commenting upon them in a highly sympathetic way, concludes with the following criticism: "Thus far our agreement with Mr. Mackenzie has been complete. But we feel compelled to join issue with him when he says, 'How this "ought" is to apply itself in the particular details of life, is largely a question for individual insight guided by the long experiment of history. It is not the business of Ethics to lay down particular moral rules.' Does not Mr. Mackenzie see that such a view is perfectly incompatible with his own just contention against the divorce of Ethics and morals? If it be impossible or unnecessary to deduce particular moral rules from the true ideal of conduct, what justification is there for saying that theory and practice are not independent of each other? The neglect to lay down particular moral rules has made all modern ethical theories incomplete. Mr. Spencer has perceived the necessity of supplying this *desideratum*, and in his 'Principles of Ethics' has made a praiseworthy attempt to classify moral virtues. It is surely an anachronism to maintain at the present day that 'it is not the business of Ethics to lay down particular rules.' " This criticism seems to me to have some force, and to deserve a reply. My answer must be, however, that I certainly do not see the incompatibility between the two elements in my view. It is possible, indeed, that I have somewhat too emphatically repudiated the effort to lay down particular rules. I certainly think that Ethics can furnish us with general principles for the regulation of conduct; but I do not think that this is incompatible with the view that, in the complications of actual life, it must after all be left to the common sense of the individual to determine how the principles are to be applied. Even in Hygienics, which is perhaps the practical science that most nearly resembles Ethics, the rules of health that are laid down are subject to considerable modifications in particular circumstances; and when we are dealing, not merely with conduct directed to such a comparatively simple end as that of securing bodily health, but towards the far more complicated end of securing the highest form of human well-being, I conceive that it must be immeasurably more difficult to devise rules which shall be directly applicable in in-

dividual cases. The power of applying principles seems to me to be an art rather than a science, and to be learned by experience rather than by the study of rules.* Even Mr. Spencer seems to admit that in dealing with the details of conduct it is not possible for Ethics to add much to the common sense of mankind. Ethics may warn common sense against false directions of activity, and set it, as it were, on the right trail, but the finding of the precise path on that trail must still be the work of common sense.†

This leads me to notice the other criticism to which I have referred above. Mr. Muirhead, in reviewing the second edition of my "Manual of Ethics" in the July number of this JOURNAL (p. 516), remarks that he would be willing to agree with the general statement of my position "if we were allowed to amend the sentence in which he says that it is the function of Ethics to enlighten us 'with respect to the principles of [by] which common sense *is to be* guided in its practical judgments,' by reading '*is* guided.' " I am sorry that I cannot accept this emendation. I believe that the common sense of mankind has often been guided by erroneous principles. I admit, indeed, with Goethe, that even in man's wildest aberrations he retains a certain consciousness of the right way. One cannot go very far astray in conduct without in some way being pulled up and made to feel the blunder, just as one cannot depart from the correct principles of health without in the end being similarly checked. But this does not make it the less true that "*es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt.*" Common sense can allow men to go pretty far astray, in matters both of health and morals, without definitely bringing them to a stand; and even if it were true that experience is a perfect teacher, she is at least a very hard one. It is only after repeated error that the right path is hit upon. It is the business of a practical science, like Ethics or Hygienics,‡ to endeavor to

* When my critic refers to the classification of moral virtues, he seems to misunderstand my point. It is not the classification of virtues, but the deduction of particular duties, that I consider to be impossible. I have endeavored to distinguish carefully between virtues and duties.

† Even in such a science as Economics, it is now generally allowed that it is a mistake to seek too directly for practical applications.

‡ I do not mean, of course, to affirm any absolute parallelism between Ethics and Hygienics. I recognize several important points of distinction. The ideal of health, for instance, is much more external to our self-conscious nature than the ideal of morals. The latter is consequently much more inevitably present,

set us on the right path without the need of this hard discipline of experience; and to set us upon it, moreover, by reason, instead of by blows and stings. This difference would be important even if experience always succeeded in setting us on the right path. But I do not think it does. The common practice of mankind, in matters both of health and of morals, is, I think, at the best only approximately right; and, in complicated matters, is often seriously wrong. It is the business of Ethics (*i.e.*, of systematic reflective thought on morals) to try to set common sense right in such matters. I admit, indeed, as Mr. Muirhead says, that Ethics is not an oracle any more than common sense. But Ethics does not set up as an oracle. No science professes to be an oracle. Reflective thought is always recognized as being critical and tentative in its methods. It is only "instincts" and "senses" that are supposed to be oracular; and with regard to the "moral sense" I entirely deny that it has any such oracular character. It is perhaps generally right, but it is sometimes wrong, and sometimes seriously wrong.* It requires to be criticised by reason.

I am glad to observe, however, that Mr. Muirhead does not really object to the application of ethical principles to practical problems. On the contrary, towards the end of his review (p. 517), he blames me for not having applied it in this way even more than I have done. He seems to think that I ought to have

even to ordinary common sense. There are, however, several points in which Ethics and Hygienics resemble each other. One important point may be noticed. Both with health and with conduct in the larger sense, the rightness and wrongness of individual action are generally more immediately obvious to common sense than the rightness and wrongness of social action. The man who thinks too much about his own health is apt to injure it; and so it seems to be with conduct in general. But we can hardly think too much about the conditions of public health or about the conditions of social welfare. Of course, in comparing Ethics with Hygienics, it should be remembered also that, in a sense, Hygienics is a branch of Ethics. Conduct with reference to Health is a part of Conduct in general. So with Economics and other practical sciences (*Cf.* the statement by Prof. Marshall on this subject in "The Economic Journal," vol. iii., No. 11, p. 389).

* There are also, I think, several matters on which ordinary common sense, even at one definite stage in its development (in a single age and country and in a single stratum of society), is confused or uncertain in its judgment, and gives no precise guidance. This seems to be the case, for instance, with respect to the population question, to which Mr. Bradley refers in his recent article. Vivisection is in a similar position; and several other cases of uncertainty in the judgments of common sense have been brought out by Dr. Sidgwick and other writers.

given a more explicit utterance on the subject of the relative merits of self-restraint and self-development in modern life. No doubt it might have been possible to deal at length with this subject, and to lay down principles that would lead to a solution of the problem in certain cases. But on the whole the answer would depend so much on individual circumstances (on questions of individual capacities and acquired habits and position in life, on questions of age, sex, and so forth), that I do not think it could be very profitably dealt with in an elementary book on Ethics.

I have ventured to make these remarks with the view of further clearing up the view of Ethics which I have been led to take, and in the hope that some one who holds a different view may be induced to give an explanation of it. I feel that I have now sufficiently uttered myself. It is some one else's turn; and unless some one else states his views at some length in opposition to mine, I do not think I am likely to be tempted to make any further explanations. Personally, I hardly understand how any other view is even possible,—at least the only other view that strikes me as consistently tenable is one such as that set forth by Dr. Simmel.*

J. S. MACKENZIE.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND.

"ITALY AND THE PAPACY."

THE three striking articles on this subject, by three representative Italian writers, which have appeared in the January, April, and July numbers of the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS*, carry the well-informed reader back to the ante-Vatican period of Italian unification;—or rather, they bring forward again, in their essentials, the very arguments and pleas which were then urged for and against the claims of the Papacy to the Temporal Sovereignty of Rome, and for and against the claim and finally the act of Italy in taking possession of her capital.

* I think the differences of opinion on this subject are largely due to the fact that Ethics may be approached from various sides. Perhaps it would be convenient to divide Ethics into three parts: (1) the psychological and anthropological part, dealing with the development of conduct and ideals of conduct in the individual and in the race; (2) the normative part, discussing the ultimate nature of the ideal involved in the moral judgment; (3) the practical part, considering the application of the moral ideal to the criticism of the moral life and of the ordinary judgments of common sense. Different writers on Ethics have naturally laid the emphasis on one or other of these parts or on some particular subdivision of them. Perhaps I, being chiefly interested in the metaphysical side, have tended to give an undue prominence to the second part.